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By Kelly Roberson, , Special to the Register12:30 a.m. CDT September 21, 2014



(Photo: The Register)

When Southeast Polk High School senior Tate Christensen went looking at colleges and universities, powerhouse schools including Yale, Harvard, Penn State, and Stanford came calling on the senior football star with a 4.2 grade point average. Christensen heard from programs in his home state, too — the University of Iowa, Iowa State University, Drake, Simpson — but headed to the University of Northern Iowa in August.

"Ultimately I chose UNI because of the academic scholarships I received as well as the financial aid," says Christensen. "Besides affordability, their educational values were also enticing. My classes are taught by professors who love their fields of study."

It's a story that's likely to be heard more and more often in the next few years, as the big three state universities — UI, ISU, and UNI — rejigger their recruitment efforts and establish a more forceful in-state presence.

That's because in June, the Iowa Board of Regents changed the formula for how it distributes money to those schools for the first time in 50 years.

Beginning in 2016, the Regents will begin a three-year phase-in of a funding formula that encourages those universities to enroll more Iowa students, emphasizes student diversity, and encourages on-track graduation. Each university stands to reap financial rewards for reaching those goals, or suffer penalties if they don't.

In essence, said Phil Caffrey, director of admissions operations and policy at Iowa State, "the change will tie approximately 65 percent of each institution's appropriation directly to its resident enrollment, while the remaining 35 percent of the appropriation will be tied to specific performance outcomes."

That formula may also be an effort to rebalance what some perceive as an imbalanced allocation: Out of \$500 million, UI received 46 percent, ISU 36 percent, and UNI 18 percent, even though ISU has a larger enrollment of Iowa residents and 90 percent of UNI's students pay in-state tuition.

For their part, admissions staff at the three state universities emphasize that recruiting has always worked hard to attract in-state students. "The change in the state appropriation distribution formula has not affected our recruitment philosophy for one simple reason: The recruitment of Iowa high school graduates has always been Iowa State University's number one priority," Caffrey said. "We have always aggressively recruited all qualified Iowa residents and we'll continue to do so."

But the three universities will likely do more to get noticed by potential in-state students, too. "We have and are going to amp up our resident recruitment efforts," said Eric Page, director of recruitment and communications in the office of admissions at Iowa. "We've evaluated what we're doing, and identified opportunities to increase outreach across the state. What we really have to convey to any student is what the University of Iowa experience is going to be like and why it is valuable to them."

That includes communications, marketing, and in-person individual outreach, says Page. "When students across the state hear 'the University of Iowa,' they think 'Hawkeyes, football, doctors, and hospital' in that order," he says. "What we need to do is have undergraduate education be higher on that list. We want to send the message that this is great place to get undergraduate education for a whole array of academic programs."

At UNI, those more aggressive in-state recruitment and communication changes began over a year ago.

"When President Ruud arrived on campus in May 2013, he saw some real opportunities to implement positive changes," said Scott Ketelsen, director of university relations and interim director of admissions at UNI. "We hired more admissions recruiters. We physically visited every high school in Iowa last year. President Ruud has an intense travel schedule going to every corner of the state spreading the word about the programs, strengths, and opportunities for all students at UNI. Our communication

efforts to potential students and their parents have been ramped up. We work hard to get potential Panthers to come to Cedar Falls and visit campus. We know that if we can get them to come see us, that our people, programs, campus, and community sells itself."

For its part, UI staff plans on an increased physical presence at high schools and college fairs, with a regional recruiter position in Des Moines that allows the university to make more contacts both in Des Moines and western Iowa.

"We are really speaking to answer the questions that people have about the University of Iowa," Page said. "The Regents literally changed the equation, and gave us an opportunity to evaluate where we are and shift where we are going. We're excited about it."